Written evidence submitted by the Association Of Peak Trail Riders (RUT0279)

1. Introduction.

We the Association of Peak Trail Riders are a business association based in the Derbyshire Peak District. We are a self help, self funded association of 55 local businesses who rely in part or in whole to legal motorcycle trail riding and the tourism it brings all year to our local rural economy. Businesses such as Guest houses, hotels, cafe's, garages, motorcycle shops and food serving public houses.

The founders are Boyd Emmerich who has a local motorcycle hire and guide business and myself Andrew Richardson. I have a local guest house also in the Derbyshire area.

The association was created to highlight the loss of tourism to our area by closure of so many green lanes by the NERC act. Further closures by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) by their powers of traffic restriction orders has also severely hit our local businesses due to the closure of further lanes to motor vehicles.

2. What is motorcycle trail riding?

Legal motorcycle trail riding is basically the same as mountain biking or horse trail riding but with a road legal motorcycle. We use legal un sealed roads to experience the countryside. As well as to enhance rider skills it has significant physical heath benefits. In addition it offers mental well being for the riders culminating from a sense of personal achievement, much as a rambler completing their walk. These customers of the Peak District come to ride their motorbikes as tourists. They are encouraged to abide by a strict code of practice which is in addition to the normal countryside code.

3. The figures

The percentage of lanes now available to this group of tourists in our area is approximately 2% of the total rights of way. These are Byways open to all traffic and a number of unclassified un surfaced roads. If you compare this to the 100% plus the right to roam that walkers enjoy or the 22% available to horse riders you can appreciate the low level of facilities we now have to attract this group of tourists to the Derbyshire area. We understand this is a trend that is happening country wide, however it is the PDNPA which has systematically undertaken to reduce and restrict this activity aggressively, with an apparent lack of regard for local businesses and jobs, as was recorded at their last APR meeting when a councillor stated that they did not want money from these people.
In the Peak District there is now only enough lanes available to offer a days riding. This means guest houses, hotels and bed and breakfast businesses no longer get the over night stay kind of trade through their doors. It is important to point out that motorcycle trail riders ride in different parts of the country as tourists to experience different terrains all year round, including winter months. This makes their business very welcome especially at quieter times for businesses in the rural communities.

Our association has been active in bringing the concerns of local business to the attention of the Park Authority, unfortunately with little response or sympathy for our trades. We have had four major and significant routes closed by Traffic orders by the Peak Park and they have another two under consultation. In both of these recent consultations there are businesses that would suffer if vehicle restrictions are imposed. We have raised this issue with the authority within our submitted consultation. We have since been advised however that these issues regarding tourism and business interests are secondary to their directives regarding the countryside.

4. Contribution to the economy.

The cost of a new motorcycle is currently around £8,000 a reasonable used machine would be around £3,000. The protective clothing would cost around £500 to £800.

Running costs would depend on the frequency of usage however the road tax, insurance, fuel, tyres, chains for example would be around £1000 to £2000 per year.

A weekend away would usually have a group of around 6 to 8 riders. This would mean accommodation, meals in the evening and the hire of a local guide. Using my last personal experience from a visit to the Lake District this year I can confirm we collectively spent in excess of £1600.

5. Summary.

In order to protect the interests of businesses such as those in our association we need to have the tourists who are readily prepared to pay for the good service that our facilities have to offer. This means a sufficient and legal infrastructure of routes to use. We realise there are people who would prefer to walk or horse ride without encountering motorcycles. With that in mind we would point out that horse riders and cyclists for example have separate and exclusive Bridleways which motorcycles cannot legally use. We would also point out that walkers have the same Bridleways and in addition all the footpaths to use which vehicles also cannot legally use. This makes up approximately 98% of lanes that are already vehicle free. We therefore feel that their options are vast and easily accessed without the need to close any more lanes to vehicles which will further damage our businesses.
We think that business interests should be a major consideration, not a minor one when making decisions on access to the countryside. We have such a small number of lanes remaining that we fear the total loss of this trade forever. We are already seeing a decline in this kind of motorcycle tourist. We realise they are leaving a black hole of finance to our local economy which is not being replaced by any other user. It might be useful to bear in mind that ramblers for example tend to bring their own food and drinks with them for a day trip, whereas the motorcyclist will spend money in our local cafes and businesses alike.

I thank you for the opportunity to respond to your enquiry. I would be pleased to give further input or clarification to any questions you may have.

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